



Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA)

A framework of support and understanding for schools and other educational establishments within which children and young people who have experienced adversity, can heal, thrive, play, and learn.

Jennifer Nock Training and Consultancy

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Sian Thomson and John Davies
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Meols drive
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Dear Sian and John,

Thank you for registering for the Attachment and Trauma Sensitive Schools Award (ATSSA) at Bronze Level, and for providing comprehensive evidence in support of your application.

Thanks also for inviting me to conduct the verification for the Award today. I should like to extend my thanks to you and your senior team and other staff for making the virtual visit so purposeful and enjoyable.

I should like to warmly congratulate you and the rest of the staff on achieving the Award, which is an external sign of recognition of your commitment to the steps you have taken at West Kirby School and College to develop a culture of compassion and nurture. This, as you well know, plays a pivotal role in getting your children and young people into a state of 'learning readiness'. The Award is valid for two years and will run from September 2020 to September 2022.

All criteria have been evidenced adequately, and in most cases, more than adequately. The evidence you have submitted comes from a variety of sources: from previous conversations I have held with John, and Shula, extracts and examples of key documents and policies provided by you; from your website and prospectus; and from interviews with staff,

including you and other members of the team. You provided me with much evidence to further support my own data gathered today, and this has added depth and context to the completed evidence folders.

There are a number of significant points that are worthy of special mention:

- An authentic, solution-focused approach is taken to offering the best possible support to families, and children's wellbeing is central to practice. This has been of particular import during the Covid-19 pandemic, and your support mechanisms are robust, many and varied, ensuring that a child and his or her family are viewed from multiple perspectives, ensuring a 360-degree view of vulnerabilities and strengths. The personalised, individual approach to all pupils is evidenced through numerous practices, including induction and information gathering, ongoing formal and informal assessment and observation, and reflective dialogue and practice. Knowledge of each pupil's needs across the developmental spectrum underpins relationships, interactions and planning.
- The commitment of the leadership team to developing a culture of attachment and trauma sensitivity has been demonstrated through a high investment in CPD for all staff, and a willingness to make changes. Leaders' passion has led to a shared vision of how to deliver the best experiences and outcomes for all the pupils at West Kirby School and College. Staff are trained to a high standard and show an excellent understanding of attachment and trauma related issues. There is a priority on safeguarding, mental health and wellbeing, with an understanding of the necessity of putting the child, his or her overall well-being and secure development at the center of education, in order for them to achieve academically. Without this prioritisation, academic results can have no authentic meaning or personal value to the child going forward into the world of work and adulthood.
- Quality staff care and emotional support to protect mental health and well-being is provided at a very high level, through SLT and varied therapeutic and peer support. Informal and spontaneous mentoring is in place and there is an extensive range of processes and strategies to protect staff from 'overwhelm' or burnout. All staff interviewed shared that support for staff is non-judgemental and that leaders are approachable and empathic. They were fully aware of avenues of support to which staff can be referred. Care for staff is a particular strength of the school.

- There are multiple mechanisms and allocated time to ensure that staff have opportunities and time to discuss individual pupils and staff strategies and responses as necessary. Several members of staff gave powerful examples of how many opportunities for reflection greatly benefit both staff and children.
- Staff are fully aware of the importance of viewing a child through a developmental lens rather than a chronological one. Throughout all the interviews, staff demonstrated sensitivity to children's histories and experiences. They were able to share comprehensive details about the background and adverse experiences of pupils in the school, explain how these experiences have impacted development and describe how they are working with these children to support regulation and develop pro-social behaviour. This is a particular strength of the school.
- Strategies to support executive function are being used consistently throughout the school. Staff who were interviewed demonstrated comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by children and young people who have difficulties with organisational and regulation skills, and therapy teams and classroom staff work seamlessly together to provide a supportive environment for learning. This is a particular strength of the school.

I hope that you will celebrate your achievement with pupils, staff, governors, parents and other stakeholders to celebrate the school's commitment to its children, successfully removing barriers to learning and participation in the life of the school. I have felt particularly privileged to share your journey, as it has largely been during the Covid-19 pandemic that we have been in close contact! I and am delighted that you intend to register for the Silver Award – Attachment and Trauma Friendly. I already look forward to continuing to support you through the next steps!

Yours sincerely,

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Bridie White LLB MA